

## **Enforcement Initiative for Farm Worker Protection**

**Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell**  
**New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection**

This past summer, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) conducted an enforcement initiative with farms in Gloucester, Atlantic, and Cumberland Counties. The primary focus of our work was to ensure compliance with pesticide regulations designed to protect the health and safety of field workers and employees who handle or apply pesticides. Over a three-day period, DEP inspected 58 farms.

In general, farm owners were cooperative and made themselves available during a very busy time of the season. After finishing our initial inspections, DEP found 41 of the 58 farms had one or more violations. Some of these were minor, such as record-keeping problems. But 19 farms had significant violations of the state's rules to protect farm workers.

During our initial inspections, DEP staff worked with each of the 41 farms cited to explain what needed to be done to bring these facilities into compliance. In September, DEP conducted follow-up inspections at the farms with the most significant violations. We were pleased to find that each of the 19, upon re-inspection, had corrected 100 percent of the violations that had previously been cited.

Our clear message during this initiative was the goal of compliance with worker safety requirements. While penalties may be issued in a select few cases where requirements went

largely unheeded, this was secondary to the goal of ensuring that the rules designed to prevent and minimize employee exposure to pesticides were met.

The results of these inspections will also allow DEP to better focus future training and outreach efforts. For example, we learned that all violations were on small and medium size farms – farms employing 50 or fewer employees. This information confirms that they are a target audience for future compliance assistance. In addition, the results of the inspections have been distributed to the Farm Bureau, Department of Agriculture, and Rutgers Cooperative Extension to help plan future training programs and a final report summarizing the inspections, conclusions, and lessons learned, will be published within the next couple of months.

This initiative reflects my overall philosophy on enforcement. As Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, I am committed to using all the tools at my disposal to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. I also strongly believe that all groups of people and all geographic areas should receive equal protection against environmental health risks. You may have heard or read of a similar initiative that took place in the City of Camden. DEP inspectors from all areas of the Department inspected over 700 facilities in the course of a weeklong initiative to ensure compliance with air, water, hazardous and solid waste, land-use and pesticide regulations. The results from both of these initiatives – especially the pollution prevented, the compliance achieved and the compliance assistance needs identified -- are very encouraging. Similar initiatives will be considered in the future.

Another significant part of my philosophy is a commitment to compliance assistance for all regulated sectors. Please do not hesitate to call upon the staff in the Pesticide Control Program or any other area of the department for help in understanding and complying with

regulations.

I want to end with my thanks to all farm owners for their efforts regarding worker safety. By working together, we can help ensure that your employees, as well as the agricultural industry overall, remain healthy and productive.